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### 'Give my Love'

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# **‘Give My Love’: Community and Companionship among Former Ragged School Scholars**

## *Abstract*

By 1884, forty years after its establishment, the London Ragged School Union estimated that 400,000 children had attended its schools. This article explores how former scholars perceived and engaged with their old ragged school community. Existing scholarship on the movement draws predominantly on its promotional literature or institutional documents, yielding limited access to the testimonies of the children themselves. As such, understanding of the children’s experiences and perspectives remains partial. Drawing on a collection of 227 letters from 57 former scholars of Compton Place Ragged School, this article offers new insights into the role that the school, its teachers, and its pupils could continue to play. The correspondence analysed here demonstrates the critical assistance teachers offered to those overseas by relaying messages and locating loved ones. Ragged school teachers acted as an important link to Britain, a source of stability during times of uncertainty. In the same way, correspondents connected their teachers and institutions to their peers by offering information as to their whereabouts and wellbeing. As such, the letters reveal the existence of ragged school networks in emigrant communities; friendships forged in the classroom continued and developed overseas.

Keywords: emigration, education, friendship, family, letters, Britain

## *Introduction*

When a new ragged school opened in Nottingham in October 1859, the figure-head of the movement and president of the London Ragged School Union (LRSU), Lord Shaftesbury, launched a celebratory speech, regaling the movement’s success to date. In these institutions children learned not only to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic, but about a God who loved them. Taught for the most part by volunteer teachers, qualified by their evangelical faith and biblical knowledge, ragged schools quickly multiplied in the mid-nineteenth century. Ragged schools were, Shaftesbury told his audience, ‘greatly on the increase’.<sup>1</sup> As he stood on the platform in Nottingham’s Mechanics’ Hall, the LRSU boasted a total of 482 schools with 23,800 scholars; ten years earlier it had counted 8,500 scholars and 82 schools.<sup>2</sup> The ‘thousands we have sent out in emigration’ – beneficiaries of the LRSU’s Emigration Fund – together with the many more who entered the army or navy, testified to the worth of the schools. The movement’s success was most

plainly demonstrated, however, in ‘the character and actions of the children themselves’. Ragged school children, he announced, ‘never forget the kindness they receive in the early periods of infancy and distress’.<sup>3</sup>

Composed upon violet paper with perfectly spaced lines, Daniel Smith wrote from Canada in 1856 to his old teacher at Compton Place Ragged School, North London. Passing on his ‘kind love’ to those associated with the institution, Smith noted that ‘although i am far away i do not forget them’.<sup>4</sup> Alongside his primary occupation as a barrister, Martin Ware taught at Compton Place for twenty-two years. During that time he received upwards of 227 letters from 57 former scholars. Penned across the globe, the letters grant unprecedented insight into the ragged school community and how it was perceived and drawn on by former scholars. Upon leaving the school in 1867, Ware took the papers, letters, and notebooks he had amassed. By doing so he curated a unique archive, unrivalled by the dry committee minutes and annual reports that are the only surviving remnants of other institutions.

In light of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, scholarship on child-saving movements has focused on the behaviours and ideas imposed upon the children to be ‘saved’.<sup>5</sup> Historians have explored how children were portrayed by groups such as Barnardo’s, the Church of England Waifs and Strays, and the LRSU, and have argued that child poverty – and the seemingly associated challenges of delinquency, immorality, and irreligion – was presented as a problem that required intervention.<sup>6</sup> Such accounts, where they do focus on the child’s experience, present a starkly negative picture lacking testimony from children themselves. As a consequence, those supposedly acted upon are left silent victims in existing histories. The letters purported to be from former scholars that were circulated in promotional pamphlets are regarded with suspicions by historians of emigration, such as Gillian Wagner, Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel. Swain and Hillel note with reference to ‘child rescue’ literature more broadly, that correspondence was ‘suitably edited’ and functioned as ‘testimonials to the importance of their work’.<sup>7</sup> With reference to the letter extracts printed by the LRSU, Wagner writes that they were intended to ‘keep public interest in the scheme

alive’.<sup>8</sup> The challenges historians face when working with such sources have been noted by David Gerber; edited content and falsified letters compromise the reliability of promotional material.<sup>9</sup>

Recent scholarship from Jane Hamlett, Steven King, and Helen Rogers has questioned the character of nineteenth-century institutions, shifting the focus from administrators and organisations to those for whom they were intended.<sup>10</sup> In seeking out the experiences and perspectives of former scholars, this article contributes to this growing area of research. It draws on the rich collection of letters that Ware preserved, using them to explore the social role that ragged school communities played in the lives of former scholars. In stark contrast to the sterilised extracts or summaries printed in the *RSUM*, the actual, physical letters that Ware received yield new insights into the role the movement could continue to play in the lives of its former scholars – as well as the role former scholars could continue to play in the school – facilitating a fuller insight into the experiences and testimonies of ragged scholars.

### *‘Mixed up together’*

Peer relationships were at the core of every ragged school. Their value was not overlooked by the LRSU; play, or ‘having a lark’, was frequently cited as an important attraction within the literature intended to inform teachers. In 1850 Henry Mayhew, the journalist and social commentator, decried the risk ragged schools were taking in allowing street-children to be ‘mixed up together’.<sup>11</sup> Five years later, George Hall grappled with the potential problem of moral ‘contamination’ in his prize-winning essay on ragged schools.<sup>12</sup> In concurrence with Mayhew, Hall wrote that ‘Without a strong and all-pervading moral influence, we shall be planting nurseries that will hasten the growth of crime’.<sup>13</sup> The chief remedy to this danger was the ragged school teacher, who should possess ‘a spirit of fortitude and faith, of self-control, self-denial, and self-sacrifice’.<sup>14</sup> Provided the teacher was appropriately qualified in character, the class in her care would come under her godly

influence. To this end, the classroom would act as ‘a kind of family’, with the teacher in the role of foster-parent to a multitude of adoptive siblings.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Mayhew’s grave warnings, the LRSU actively encouraged children being ‘mixed up together’. The *RSUM*’s ‘Teachers’ Column’, which provided advice to teachers, upheld peer relationships as an important incentive to be harnessed and utilised to the schools’ advantage. Where friendships did not promote disruptive behaviour they were to be praised and fostered. During an account of a ragged school dinner party featured in the *RSUM* in 1868, readers were informed that the institutions did not enforce ‘silence – the buzz you hear is only “table talk” and will aid digestion’.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Hall condemned schools that enforced ‘unchildlike quietness’, ‘imprison[ing]’ children for ‘three or four hours together’.<sup>17</sup> Given that the majority of children attended the schools freely, it was crucial that the institutions were appealing in order to ensure attendance. To use Hall’s simple words, ‘much will depend, and ought to depend, on the attractions presented by the school itself’.<sup>18</sup>

In 1858 the *RSUM* asserted ‘the importance of ragged children of tender years being taught “to play rather than work”’.<sup>19</sup> Three years later, the magazine pronounced that ‘Occasional recreation is one of the necessities of life’.<sup>20</sup> Given the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theories regarding education and child development by this period – that childhood should be a happy, almost sanctified, time – it is not surprising that the importance of play was stressed by the LRSU.<sup>21</sup> Although John Burnett has observed that there was a ‘sharp distinction’ between the kind of amusements engaged in by the working and the middle classes in the nineteenth century, it is nevertheless plain that the LRSU aspired to a system wherein poor children enjoyed the benefits of play.<sup>22</sup> According to the *RSUM*, there was inherent truth in the familiar proverb ‘All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’.<sup>23</sup> Writing in Scotland, Thomas Guthrie, the so-called ‘apostle of the ragged schools’, declared that ‘whatever interferes with [a child’s] free and full play is an evil to be shunned’.<sup>24</sup> In line with broader evangelical sentiments, penny gaffs, dancing halls, and public houses were condemned as immoral by the movement. As a consequence, it was crucial for

institutions to offer wholesome activities and entertainment to fulfil the children's need for 'occasional recreation'.<sup>25</sup> Ragged school children were, stated the *RSUM*, 'as fond of frolic and fun, of leap-frog and marbles, of juvenile sports and pastimes, as the children of the higher classes'.<sup>26</sup> Scholars would be happier, healthier, and more responsive to learning given the opportunity to 'run and romp', or indulge in 'a game of leap-frog or cricket'.<sup>27</sup> Play, at its core, was communal; frequently cited games, such as leap-frog and marbles, required multiple players.

Reflecting this emphasis on play, the LRSU advised teachers to organise excursions. Trips to the countryside, or to a local park or zoo, enabled children to spend time together in the open air. From its inception in 1858 the Society for Providing Public Playgrounds received the support of the LRSU, which promoted the cause within the *RSUM*.<sup>28</sup> Successful events, whether 'treat' meals or organised trips, were related with frequency in ragged school literature. In the summer of 1856 scholars from Lamb and Flag Ragged School learned archery and indulged in 'a substantial dinner of beef and sandwiches', while 126 boys and girls from Ratcliffe Ragged School benefitted from a gymnasium, bats and balls, and an abundance of almonds.<sup>29</sup> It was not unusual for wealthy individuals to patronise local institutions, frequently offering their extensive grounds for the purpose of ragged school excursions. Schools across the metropolis had 'been invited to dine and tea at the mansion of a wealthy and benevolent counsellor, and play their merry gambols on his lawns, and ramble in his meadows'.<sup>30</sup> Accounts of Christmas meals and 'gala festivals' regularly featured in the *RSUM* over the winter. The 'Ragged School Christmas Treat' had, by February 1858, 'become household words' – so much so that a ragged school without one was 'a peculiar exception to the general rule'.<sup>31</sup> By 1857 the LRSU estimated that over 8,000 children, from approximately 40 London schools, had 'visited the most delightful spots'.<sup>32</sup> Four years later this number had risen to 18,696.<sup>33</sup>

Representing the fruits of their teachers' labours together with the financial investment of the audience, the transformed ragged child was the ultimate marker of success. In the same way that nineteenth-century 'waif stories' conveyed conversion through the adoption of middle-class

traits, the salvation of ragged scholars was communicated in descriptions of the children's appearance and demeanour.<sup>34</sup> For Shaftesbury, the connection between the children's physical and spiritual selves was self-evident. When describing the purpose of the schools, he described how they sought to receive 'them ragged, but their object was to turn them out clothed, as their object was to receive them heathen and turn them out accomplished Christians'.<sup>35</sup> Reports of ragged school prize-giving ceremonies or Christmas meals wove descriptions of the children's bodies and behaviours into their narratives, communicating the transformation to those supporters unable to be present. The alteration in the children's appearances was marked according to an account of a LRSU prize-giving ceremony in 1861, which told readers that there 'was nothing less likely to explain the title of "Ragged School" Union than the scholars, whose 'neat appearance and orderly behaviour would do no discredit to establishments with more pretentious titles'.<sup>36</sup> The same children were 'decent, respectable, and virtuous boys and girls', an asset to their institution.<sup>37</sup>

By 1854 an estimated 20,000 children had passed through the schools in the metropolis.<sup>38</sup> With the number of former scholars growing exponentially each year, it was becoming increasingly difficult for teachers to retain knowledge of each child's situation. In 1858, following an account of a meeting of former scholars at St Giles Ragged School, the *RSUM* strongly advocated institutions hosting similar gatherings.<sup>39</sup> The first meeting of this kind to be described in the *RSUM* was held by Clare Market Ragged School. Scheduled to take place on Queen Victoria's birthday, former scholars met in a schoolroom bedecked for the occasion with flags and paintings.<sup>40</sup> By 1861 Clare Market Ragged School's annual reunion was 'so established a custom that few require any special invitation'. 'It was', according to the *RSUM*, 'very gratifying to all the "Old Friends" to see so many of their "Old Scholars" now prospering ... and bringing forth good fruit'.<sup>41</sup> Such gatherings were lauded as a means of strengthening the relationship between teacher and taught, enabling the connection to endure 'into their riper years to mutual gratification', and were adopted by institutions across the city.<sup>42</sup>

Separated by oceans, ragged scholars in the army, navy, or those who had emigrated were unable to attend reunions. Encouraged to write by their teachers, extracts from their letters were integrated within annual reports. During the LRSU's fifth annual meeting a letter from a former scholar destined for Australia was read aloud. After reciting the opening, those present were instructed: 'Now mark the next passage; it is the most pithy and interesting of all. "And I will write to you again as soon as I reach Adelaide"'. This line, according to the speaker, demonstrated 'the confidence that was in the little creature's heart, that the conductors of these Ragged Schools had a deep interest in their temporal and eternal welfare'.<sup>43</sup> The two letters read at Hopkins Street Ragged School's annual meeting in 1849 'were full of expressions of gratitude for the aid they had received'.<sup>44</sup> One of the letters featured in a LRSU pamphlet promoting emigration, signed by four boys, read:

We could not think of leaving England without expressing to you most hearty thanks for all your care of us since we were admitted to the Refuge. We thank you for our protection, our education ...for our food and clothing... We may forget some we once knew; we never can forget Lord Ashley and the Committee.<sup>45</sup>

As Swain and Hillel highlight, extracts such as these testified to the movement's success. Printed in reports or read aloud at meetings, these fragments of letters – whether genuine or fictitious – do not offer any meaningful glimpse into the experiences of former scholars or their relationship with their ragged school. While they are useful in highlighting the narratives crafted and promoted by the LRSU, the perspective conveyed is nevertheless that of the teachers and committee members. In order to come within earshot of the former scholars themselves – to learn how they regarded their old school, teachers, and peers – it is necessary to consult the actual letters they composed.

*'I had not forgot you'*

By corresponding with their old ragged school, former scholars retained connections to both their homelands and their pasts. As Susan Matt's research on the experiences of American immigrants



shows, emigrants ‘did not completely shed their pasts or free themselves of homesickness’.<sup>46</sup> The past remained a part of them in the present; common acquaintances, places, and memories offered emotional stability to those whose immediate surroundings were unfamiliar. In remembering and being remembered former ragged scholars revived old connections and brought them to life in their present.

Letter-writing enabled emigrants to sustain their ‘links with the past’ while establishing a new life overseas.<sup>47</sup> The letters Ware received offer compelling evidence that corresponding with their old ragged school offered continuity for those whose lives had markedly changed. Given that the school was the medium through which correspondents had originally encountered Ware and formed the context of later interaction, it is natural that letters referenced this shared history. Many letter-writers reminisced about their time at Compton Place, grounding their letter content in memory, as William Eaton did when he told how he ‘off times think off the words on sunday evening at my school’.<sup>48</sup> John Hall used similar language when he informed Ware that he ‘offon think of you my kind teachers And the happy knights that i have spent with you’.<sup>49</sup> The most detailed narrative is found in a letter from Charles Henley, written from Tipperary, which recited his first encounter with Ware. He recalled how he had ‘wandered about penniless & hungry. You met me at the bottom of Gray’s Inn Rd & took me to the St. Pancras Industrial School’. In concluding his narrative Henley wrote ‘since then you have been my best Friend and I shall never be able to repay your goodness’.<sup>50</sup> In detailing the very street their encounter took place on, Henley affirmed his ongoing connection to both Ware and London, to people and place. Moreover, such letters testify to the affective and warm bonds that could be forged between scholars and their schools. For Eaton and Hall, the memories they held of Compton Place enabled them to retreat to their old and familiar classroom despite their physical distance. Henley’s words, though underpinned by memory, suggest that he continued to count Ware among his closest friends.

In addition to granting insight into correspondents’ happy memories, the letters show that former scholars were able to tap into the continuing Compton Place community by enquiring after

those still there. Although addressed to Ware, the letters included greetings intended for other teachers or former classmates. When sending his 'love' to his mother, brothers, and sisters, John Dowie afterwards added '– & my thanks to Mr Fowler, Mr Howard & the [Ragged School] Committee'.<sup>51</sup> Richard Warner passed on similar greetings, writing 'Give my respects to all the gentleman in the society to Mr & Mrs Howard and all enquiring friends'.<sup>52</sup> When reminiscing about the school, Benjamin Wiles included Mr Fordham in his account and used the opportunity to send him greetings, writing 'i shall not forget what you taught me when i was in the school and Mr Fordam to and i thank Mr Fordam for that Bible he gave me'.<sup>53</sup> A comparable statement is found in his next and final letter, in which he wrote 'I shall not be home for some time but I shall not forget what I learned at your School and with Mr Fordam'. On the final page of his letter Wiles asked Ware to 'tell Mr Fordam I shall not neglect his Bible that he gave me'.<sup>54</sup> News from Ware represented an enduring connection to London, as well as an ongoing association with those who continued to live there and attend the school. In this way, former scholars remained part of the school community.

Benjamin Wiles's assertion that he 'shall not forget' the Compton Place lessons is part of a recurring narrative of forgetfulness, echoing Shaftesbury's words in Nottingham: they 'never forget the kindness they receive in the early periods of infancy and distress'. Remembrance and the worry of forgetfulness is a theme that bleeds across the letters. To forget those in England or to be forgotten yourself signified estrangement from your English past and the loss of personal history. Ten out of 57 correspondents, or eighteen per cent, used the words 'forget', 'forgot', or 'forgotten' in the context of their relationships with others. Often correspondents used the term to dispel concerns that they had forgotten Ware, the school, family, or friends. Writing in March 1864, Thomas Ramsay noted 'my dear Mr Ware i dare say you thort that i had forgotten you and the kindness that i have Reseved from you and all the gentlemen Coneted With the Sorciety'. He assured his teacher of the contrary, writing 'i do not Beleave thear has been One day Past that i [have not] thort of your kindness to me'.<sup>55</sup> For Charles Wiles the act of writing itself signified that

he had not forgotten Ware. He opened his tenth letter with the sentence: ‘i now sit down to write a few lines to you which i ought to have done before now but never mind Better late then never it Dose show that i had not forgot you’.<sup>56</sup>

As well as being keen to demonstrate that they had not forgotten those at home, former scholars sought reassurance that they themselves had not been forgotten. Upon hearing from Ware, Charles Whiteman responded ‘it is a Great pleasure ~~to me~~ to me to think that I am not forgot’.<sup>57</sup> When a timely response did not arrive, the worry of being forgotten surfaced as an explanation for silence. After sending ‘that kind schoolmaster Mr Fraser’ two letters, John Campbell confided his fear in Ware, writing: ‘I hope he has not forgotten me all at once’.<sup>58</sup> Just as Wiles’s letter referenced above suggested that a letter denoted remembrance, he opened his twelfth writing ‘I now sit down to answer your most kind and welcome Letter and i was verry much please when i read it to think that you had not forget me’.<sup>59</sup> The act of remembrance, like letter-writing itself, was reciprocal. The reciprocity of memory is demonstrated in Michael Murphy’s words ‘I hope you wont for get mee for I shall never forget you’.<sup>60</sup> In remembering and being remembered former ragged school scholars across the globe retained links to Britain, establishing stability in ever-changing and uncertain circumstances.

### *‘Give my love’*

Families were frequently prohibited from writing to their sons overseas by poor literacy or limited funds with which to purchase paper and stamps. Because of this, Ware was the sole correspondent of a number of former scholars. J. Archer wrote simply ‘I have no other friend to write to’, while William Connor observed that he had ‘not heard from England not since your letter’.<sup>61</sup> By echoing the content of their old teacher’s letters, the correspondence demonstrates that Ware routinely passed on news of family and friends. George Chapman was ‘very glad to have such a good account’ of his family, while Edward Connor passed on his gratitude after learning that his brother, William, was ‘well’.<sup>62</sup>

In his research on the experiences of working-class emigrants in the nineteenth century, Gary Howell argues that the poor were assertive when seeking help from the wealthy in their homeland.<sup>63</sup> Such presumptions are arguably evident in the letters addressed to Ware. Correspondents bestowed on their old teacher the role of medium or messenger, requesting him to call on their mothers, to pass on particular pieces of news, or to make specific inquiries. Chapman asked him to visit his mother and ‘teler’ that he had reached Canada ‘saef and that I ham very hapey’, while Peter Carpenter noted ‘Please to give my love to my Grandmother, brother, and sister’.<sup>64</sup> Writing from Canada in July 1859, Dowie tasked Ware with inquiring after his mother’s spiritual wellbeing. ‘I wood be glad if you wood go and see my Mouter and tork to [her] about her soul’, he wrote, ‘for I am a fraid that shee is not on the rite Rode to her God’.<sup>65</sup> Ware patently did as Dowie requested; his next letter thanked Ware for visiting his mother and again discussed his concerns regarding her mother’s salvation.<sup>66</sup>

Ware could prove a crucial contact, a solitary bridge connecting those overseas to social and familial networks at home. James Ward included a letter for his mother in his post to Ware as he ‘did not know whether she had changed her abode or not’.<sup>67</sup> Writing from his Dublin barracks, Charles Wiles acknowledged his gratitude to Ware, noting that he ‘was glad that you told me that my mother had moved’.<sup>68</sup> For both Ward and Wiles, Ware was an important constant. In April 1860 Daniel Smith asked Ware to investigate if his parents were still living.<sup>69</sup> His next letter, dated 1 July 1860, relayed Ware’s words: ‘you say in your letter that you cannot find out where my father his living’.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Robert Collier wrote to Ware from his post in the navy in January 1865, thanking him for ‘been so good as to try to find out where my brouther is’ and lamenting the news that he was ‘not to be found out’.<sup>71</sup> Collier’s next letter, sent two months later, again beseeched Ware to find his brother, who he had not heard from ‘since I left home that was the Crismas before larst’.<sup>72</sup> Together the letters Ware received encompass a multitude of fragmented or lost relationships. Lost pages, misplaced letters, unarticulated words, and sudden, abrupt endings to correspondence mean it is impossible to know for certain whether Smith, Collier, or the many

other letter-writers who asked similar questions, ever re-established contact with their loved ones. Small excerpts such as these showcase the critical role ragged school teachers could play in facilitating contact between former scholars and their families and highlight the dependence that distance and poverty fostered. At the same time, the oft-repeated requests testify to the resourcefulness of the emigrants. Individuals such as Dowie, Collier, and Smith sought to utilise Ware and his connections to their advantage.

Alongside inquiries about family members, many letters carried questions regarding the wellbeing or whereabouts of peers. In the same letter in which he asked Ware to find his parents, Smith wrote ‘I hope in your answer ... you will send me a few Directions of some of my kind friends whom i wish to hear from very much indeed’.<sup>73</sup> William Eaton asked for news of Thomas Taylor and John Pickering, while Michael Murphy asked after John Hart.<sup>74</sup> Sent from Ontario, John Redan’s only letter to Ware instructed, rather than asked, him to ‘let me know if you have got a letter from Williamson let me no Where he is And if he has got a good place’.<sup>75</sup> Correspondents passed on messages to their peers via Ware; John Campbell promised to send his class a letter, asking Ware to tell ‘the boys at the school’ that ‘you have heard from me and hope they are all good boys’.<sup>76</sup> Before emigrating to Canada, Frederick Henderson lived and worked in Canterbury for a short time. On notepaper headed with a woodblock print of Canterbury Cathedral, sent in August 1862, Henderson explained: ‘I have enclosed a note for John Rowe. and will you Please to be so kind as to give it to him on Sunday if you See him. So as he can Show the Boys another view of Canterbury. which I think they will like to see’.<sup>77</sup> Writing from Ottawa eleven months later, Henderson passed on his ‘love to John Rowe, Cole Mackintosh, & all the other lads’.<sup>78</sup>

### *‘Old Scholar’ Communities*

Connections made in the classroom continued and thrived beyond school walls. Friendships were not relegated to memory; rather, former scholars corresponded and arranged their own 'old scholar' meetings. Communities of former ragged school children could be familiar and important networks. Such networks were not necessarily restricted according to institution. Writing from Hamilton, Canada, Chapman informed Ware that he had met with five emigrants from Brook Street Ragged School.<sup>79</sup> It was thanks to a chance meeting with a former Field Lane scholar (taught by Ware's brother, James) that Smith obtained his teacher's address after he misplaced it.<sup>80</sup> Not all references to other schools were positive, however; Hart critiqued the behaviour of the boys from Grotto Passage Ragged School, a neighbour to Compton Place, observing 'I don't think much of Grotto boys they was very rude on board ship to old people and also to ladies'.<sup>81</sup>

Writing in July 1859, Ward recounted a reunion he had with three of his former classmates. Travelling from Prince Edward Island to Adolphustown, Ward met with 'Harry, Guy & Dick'. He relayed back to Ware that 'they were all well they told me to remember them to you', before adding that they planned to meet again later that week.<sup>82</sup> When Ware informed Smith, who was resident in Toronto, that his friend, Thomas Jones, was living in Ottawa, he made plans to visit him. Composed on 16 March 1857, Smith informed Ware that he was 'saving up a few dollars to go and see him on King Williams day', 12 July, a holiday in the city.<sup>83</sup> The same month of their planned meeting, Jones wrote to Ware with news of Smith. The happy meeting Smith had envisioned had not taken place as he had fallen ill with 'fever and ague' and consequently lost his employment. Jones's letter demonstrates the effort he went to in assisting Smith; after learning that Smith wished 'very much to come to this city', Jones spoke with his master who agreed to employ him on the condition that he would train as a baker. Summarising the situation, Jones told Ware that he 'expect[s] him here Tomorrow'.<sup>84</sup> Charles Whiteman had similar aspirations of working alongside his school friend, John Pickering. Penned on Christmas day in 1859, Whiteman told Ware that he intended to 'go down to Ottawa City to mete [Pickering]', after which he would 'ask master to heire him to stop with me on his farm'.<sup>85</sup> After describing his plans, he instructed Ware to

communicate the information to Pickering. Whiteman's plans did not come to fruition, however; in a letter composed four months later he described his disappointment 'that Pickering will not be able to come Over', writing 'if he would come he might work with me'.<sup>86</sup>

A particularly pertinent story of friendship is found in John Crawley's letters. Writing from aboard the HMS *Donegal*, docked Plymouth in March 1861, Crawley asked 'Please sir Do you know where George Wiles is'. Like Crawley, Wiles was in the navy and was stationed in Plymouth. Crawley explained his predicament to Ware, writing that although he had tried to find Wiles 'they would not let me see him because he was no relation'.<sup>87</sup> Composed just two weeks later, Crawley's next letter repeated the same simple question: 'please sir do you know where George Wiles is'.<sup>88</sup> In October Ware received happier news from Crawley. His sought-after friend had been allocated to his ship for an expedition to Gibraltar. Describing this joyful voyage, Crawley told Ware that 'We was three weeks going there and me and George was skylarking all the way out'.<sup>89</sup> Wiles likewise relayed the happy event to his former teacher, writing how, upon boarding the *Donegal*, 'I saw John Crawley and I was very glad to see him and him to see me'.<sup>90</sup>

Although ragged school teachers evidently played a key role in facilitating contact between former scholars, this situation was frequently reversed. In the same way that the letters Ware received contained questions regarding the localities of their peers, they also offered answers. Correspondents dutifully wrote with news of their former classmates, forwarding information to Ware in the same way that he did to them. When resident in 'Tronto' in 1857, Chapman notified Ware that one of his former classmates had 'been in the horspitle', while another had relocated to Brantford and was 'doing well'.<sup>91</sup> Chapman's own activities would soon be detailed in letters sent to Ware. After thanking his old teacher for sending news of his family in London, Ward listed news of his peers: 'Georgge Chapman is enlisted in the army', 'Harry & Guy is not doing very well', and 'Roby as gone to Smith's Falls close to Ottawa'.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Francis McMarris reported 'Gorge Chapman has left Torontoe alone Two monthes agoe we advise him to F keep his place But he would not'.<sup>93</sup> This is the only preserved letter from McMarris. Because of this, it is difficult

to discern to whom he was referencing when he wrote ‘we advise’ Chapman to stay. Nevertheless, McMarris’s letter suggests that former scholars could act as a support system, offering guidance or assistance to their peers.

### *Conclusions*

Through excursions and Christmas treats ragged schools sought to foster a sense of shared community. These efforts did not cease when children left the school, as, it was hoped, former scholars would retain their connection to the institution through annual reunions. The letters examined here suggest that ragged school communities continued to exist and to thrive beyond the classroom. While largely limited to one institution, the correspondence is nevertheless valuable in granting a rare insight into the relationships that were possible. While the schools themselves advocated continued contact as a marker of success and a means of retaining influence, scholars themselves appear to have sought out contact with their old ragged school. The former scholars’ own words add colour to the black and white letters published in LRSU pamphlets, offering an important dimension to understanding.

The letters Ware received testify to the value their authors placed upon their old ragged school. While gratitude was a common component of the letters circulated by the LRSU, the correspondence analysed here indicates that the school brought back fond memories for some. Former ragged scholars found comfort in news of their peers and teachers; correspondence signified a continuing relationship with their old school. In sharing news from the school and passing on greetings, teachers such as Ware connected those overseas to the Compton Place community.

Those correspondents who articulated a fear of being forgotten powerfully convey the sense of vulnerability emigrants could feel, as well as the security that institutions and contacts in the homeland could impart. Moreover, the frequent inquiries regarding family and friends



highlights the sense of dependence that distance generated. In referencing their uncertainty regarding their mothers' addresses, the letters of Ward and Wiles suggest Ware was an important constant who connecting them to their families. At the same time, the questions – and instructions – from former scholars speak of their resourcefulness, revealing that they engaged with and utilised the opportunities available.

A myriad of ragged school networks existed, as friendships developed in the context of a London ragged school were translated overseas. John Crawley and George Wiles's letters speak of the joy of their reunion; their friendship brought with it continuity and familiarity. Such networks could prove crucial in times of difficulty. Correspondents such as Thomas Jones sought to help peers who were facing trying times, providing an important social and economic support system. Just as Ware related information regarding those at home, correspondents passed on news of former scholars in their community. Whether offering news of illness or relocation, letter-writers informed their old teacher of notable developments among their peers.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Earl of Shaftesbury on Ragged Schools', *The Times*, 22 October 1859, 8.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Fifteenth Anniversary of the Ragged School Union', *RSUM* (June 1859), 105; 'Brief Abstract of the Fifth Annual Report of the Ragged School Union', *RSUM* (June 1849), 101.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Earl of Shaftesbury on Ragged Schools', *The Times*, 22 October 1859, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 3 December 1856, Surrey History Centre (SHC) 1487/159/2.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; repr. London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Linda Mahood and Barbara Littlewood, 'The "Vicious" Girl and the "Street-Corner" Boy: Sexuality and the Gendered Delinquent in the Scottish Child-Saving Movement 1850-1940', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (1994), 549-578; Gillian Wagner, *Children of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Swain and Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire*, 161.

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> David Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Helen Rogers, "'Oh, What Beautiful Books!': Captivated Reading in an Early Victorian Prison', *Victorian Studies* 55:1 (2012), 57-84.

<sup>11</sup> 'Labour and the Poor, Letter XLIV', *Morning Chronicle*, 25 March 1850.

<sup>12</sup> George Hall, *Sought and Saved: A Prize Essay on the Ragged Schools and Kindred Institutions* (London: Partridge and Oakley, 1855).

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- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 131.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 132.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, 133.
- <sup>16</sup> 'The Children's Dinner Party', *RSUM* (December 1868), 272.
- <sup>17</sup> Hall, *Sought and Saved*, 87.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 39.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Papers, Original and Selected: The School Playground and Scholars' Workshop', *RSUM* (May 1858), 81.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Free Lectures for the Poor', *RSUM* (April 1861), 83.
- <sup>21</sup> See Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1995), 65-74; Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 24-27.
- <sup>22</sup> John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 240.
- <sup>23</sup> 'Free Lectures for the Poor', *RSUM* (April 1861), 83.
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas Guthrie, *A Plea for Ragged Schools; or, Prevention Better Than Cure* (Edinburgh: Elder, 1847), 6.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Free Lectures for the Poor', *RSUM* (April 1861), 83.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Papers, Original and Selected: The School Playground and Scholars' Workshop', *RSUM* (May 1858), 81.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 83.
- <sup>28</sup> See 'Public Playgrounds', *RSUM* (July 1859), 138-139.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Ragged School Excursions', *RSUM* (September 1856), 167.
- <sup>30</sup> 'The Children's Merry-Making, and the Teachers' Holiday at Nutfield', *RSUM* (October 1857), 193.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Christmas Treats to Ragged School Children', *RSUM* (February 1858), 35.
- <sup>32</sup> 'The Children's Merry-Making, and the Teachers' Holiday at Nutfield', *RSUM* (October 1857), 193.
- <sup>33</sup> 'The Children's Holidays', *RSUM* (November 1861), 269.
- <sup>34</sup> A. Davin, 'Waif stories in late nineteenth century England', *History Workshop Journal* 52 (Autumn 2001) 67-98.
- <sup>35</sup> Ragged School Union, *The Times*, 20 February 1857, 10.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Ragged School Union', *Daily News*, 20 March 1861.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Proceedings at the Tenth Anniversary of the Ragged School Union', *RSUM* (June 1854), 111.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Former Scholars of Ragged Schools', *RSUM* (April 1858), 75.
- <sup>40</sup> 'Old Scholars' Meeting', *RSUM* (July 1859), 135-136.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Old Scholars' Meeting', *RSUM* (August 1861), 196.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> 'Proceedings at the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Ragged School Union', *RSUM* (June 1849), 106-107.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Intelligence: Hopkins Street Ragged School', *RSUM* (May 1849), 97.
- <sup>45</sup> *Letters from Ragged School Emigrants* (London: Blackburn and Burt, 1848), 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 170.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 161.
- <sup>48</sup> William Eaton to Ware, 11 February 1858, SHC 1487/130/1.
- <sup>49</sup> John Hall to Ware, 1 January 1856, SHC 1487/134/2.
- <sup>50</sup> Charles Henley to Ware, 16 October 1870, SHC 1487/139/1.
- <sup>51</sup> John Dowie to Ware, 16 January 1854, SHC 1487/129/3.
- <sup>52</sup> Richard Warner to Ware, 23 June 1865, SHC 1487/161/3.
- <sup>53</sup> Benjamin Wiles to Ware, 20 August 1864, SHC 1487/163/2.
- <sup>54</sup> Benjamin Wiles to Ware, 29 January 1864, SHC 1487/163/3.
- <sup>55</sup> Thomas Ramsay to Ware, 12 March 1864, SHC 1487/149/3.
- <sup>56</sup> Charles Wiles to Ware, 24 July 1863, SHC 1487/164/10.
- <sup>57</sup> Charles Whiteman to Ware, 20 February 1862, SHC 1487/162/8.
- <sup>58</sup> John Campbell to Ware, 18 December 1859, SHC 1487/122/2.
- <sup>59</sup> Charles Wiles to Ware, 17 June 1864, SHC 1487/164/12.
- <sup>60</sup> Michael Murphy to Ware, 24 June 1855, SHC 1487/145/3.
- <sup>61</sup> J. Archer to Ware, 25 July 1866, 1487/119/1; William Connor to Ware, 12 January 1862, 1487/127/7.
- <sup>62</sup> George Chapman to Ware, 15 October 1859, 1487/124/3; Edward Connor to Ware, 23 March 1858, SHC 1487/126/1.
- <sup>63</sup> Gary Howells, "'For I Was Tired of England Sir': English Pauper Emigrant Strategies, 1834-60", *Journal of Social History* 23 (1998), 181-194 (188).
- <sup>64</sup> George Chapman to Ware, 14 June 1857, 1487/124/1; Peter Carpenter to Ware, 27 April 1856, 1487/123/1.
- <sup>65</sup> John Dowie to Ware, 18 July 1859, 1487/129/3.
- <sup>66</sup> John Dowie to Ware, 27 November 1859, 1487/129/4.
- <sup>67</sup> James Ward to Ware, 7 January 1861, SHC 1487/141/7.
- <sup>68</sup> Charles Wiles to Ware, 4 July 1861, 1487/164/5.
- <sup>69</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 1 April 1860, 1487/159/4.
- <sup>70</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 1 July 1860, 1487/159/5.

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- <sup>71</sup> Robert Collier to Ware, 4 January 1865, SHC 1487/125/2.  
<sup>72</sup> Robert Collier to Ware, March 1865, SHC 1487/125/3.  
<sup>73</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 1 April 1860, SHC 1487/159/4.  
<sup>74</sup> William Eaton to Ware, 11 February 1858, SHC 1487/130/1; Michael Murphy to Ware, 8 July 1855, SHC 1487/145/4.  
<sup>75</sup> John Redan to Ware, 22 October 1857, SHC 1487/150/1.  
<sup>76</sup> John Campbell to Ware, 10 March 1861, SHC 1487/122/4.  
<sup>77</sup> Frederick Henderson to Ware, August 1862, SHC 1487/138/2.  
<sup>78</sup> Frederick Henderson to Ware, 19 July 1863, SHC 1487/138/4.  
<sup>79</sup> George Chapman to Ware, 14 June 1857, SHC 1487/124/1.  
<sup>80</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 1 April 1860, SHC 1487/159/4.  
<sup>81</sup> John Hart to Ware, 3 April 1856, SHC 1487/137/1.  
<sup>82</sup> James Ward to Ware, 12 July 1859, SHC 1487/141/3.  
<sup>83</sup> Daniel Smith to Ware, 16 March 1857, SHC 1487/159/3.  
<sup>84</sup> Thomas Jones to Ware, 20 July 1857, SHC 1487/142/2.  
<sup>85</sup> Charles Whiteman to Ware, 25 December 1859, SHC 1487/162/2.  
<sup>86</sup> Charles Whiteman to Ware, 9 April 1860, SHC 1487/162/3.  
<sup>87</sup> John Crawley to Ware, 17 March 1861, SHC 1487/128/2.  
<sup>88</sup> John Crawley to Ware, 2 April 1861, SHC 1487/128/3.  
<sup>89</sup> John Crawley to Ware, 23 October 1861, SHC 1487/128/4.  
<sup>90</sup> George Wiles to Ware, 29 July 1861, SHC 1487/165/1.  
<sup>91</sup> George Chapman to Ware, 15 October 1857, SHC 1487/124/3.  
<sup>92</sup> James Ward to Ware, 7 February 1859, SHC 1487/141/2.  
<sup>93</sup> Francis McMarris to Ware, 20 June 185[9], SHC 1487/144/1.